

Super Weird by mille_libri

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Summary:

Mike and Will try to talk to each other about what happened to them.

Super Weird

It was a mild day in early December before Mike and Will were alone together. Lucas was helping his dad in their garage and Dustin was home with a cold, so it was just the two of them biking home after school.

Or at least they started biking. Then Will had a coughing fit in the middle of the road, turning away and covering his mouth. Mike got off his bike and pretended to be looking at the wheel, to give Will some privacy.

When at last the coughing passed, Will came over and stood next to Mike. "Hey. Sorry."

"It's okay. You all right?"

"Yeah. Just ..." Will cleared his throat. "I'll be okay."

"Good." Mike had never really asked Will about his ordeal. Or, he had asked, but in the same breathless conversation as Lucas and Dustin, all of them firing questions at Will and ... not noticing that Will hadn't really answered, he realized now. "Was it awful?"

Will nodded. "Pretty awful. It was ... so cold. And there were things just floating in the air, like pieces of—everything. Like everything was coming apart. I wondered how long it would be before I started to come apart." He shoved his hands in his coat pockets and looked down at the ground. "I don't like to think about it."

"I don't think I would, either."

"But—I can't not think about it." Will lifted his head. Mike could see that there were still dark circles under his friend's eyes. He still looked exhausted, and pale, and sick. He hadn't noticed before—Will was pretending to be fine, and most people bought it. But Mike didn't feel like 'most people' anymore. Something was different about him now. After Elle—Watching her for her reactions, he had learned to look at people more closely. He had realized that not everyone said what they were thinking. Something about Will reminded him of

Eleven now, that was it. The big eyes and the silence and the way they seemed to have so much to say and to keep it to themselves.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asked Will. "I won't say anything to anyone, if you do."

Will looked tempted. His eyes moved like he was thinking about how to start. Then he seemed to fold in on himself, a shadow crossing his face. "I can't. I just—not if I ever want to get any sleep again." He shivered. It wasn't that cold, at least, no colder than it had been. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I asked. I shouldn't have."

"I wish I could tell you. I feel like—" Will hesitated. "I feel like, out of everyone, you might understand."

Mike was touched.

"Hey. Do you—do you want to tell me about ... Eleven?"

"Oh. Um ..." Mike didn't like to talk about her. Which was tough, because Dustin talked about her all the time, not realizing how much it hurt Mike that she was gone. "She was—different."

Will smiled. "That's what Dustin says."

Mike smiled, too. "Dustin says she was a freak who could move things with her mind."

"Well, yeah. That's pretty cool."

"It was. It was amazing. She saved my life." He told Will about the time at the quarry. They had told him before, but in a hurry, all three of them talking at once. Now he told it straight through, thinking how weird it was that they had thought Will had drowned in that same quarry when in fact he had never really left his house.

"You jumped to save Dustin? That was really brave."

It was the one thing no one had said. In his secret heart, Mike had been waiting for someone to notice. "Thanks. But, really, it was kind

of stupid. They weren't going to let Dustin go even if I jumped, and it's not like if I had died in the quarry they would have stopped picking on him. Troy's a mouth-breather; always will be." He could hear Elle say it in his mind, that special tone of contempt she had used.

Will seemed to get that. "Yeah, but you did it anyway. I mean ... it was stupid for my mom to come into the Upside Down for me. She could have died and then Jonathan would have been left all alone. But if she hadn't—" He looked away, his skin even paler than it had been a minute ago.

He had never told them what happened before his mom rescued him, and Mike didn't want to ask. If Will wanted him to know, Will would say. "She's your mom," he said. "What else was she going to do?" All the same, though, he wondered about his mom. Will's mom was ... different than other people, always had been. If he had disappeared, would his mom have believed he lived in the lights? Would she have gone into the Upside Down after him? He wanted to think so—but he had a hard time picturing it. She hadn't even noticed Elle was there. Will's mom would have known there was someone in her house, and not just because they had a smaller house.

"I guess."

There seemed like nothing more to say, so Will reached down to grab his bike, and they walked together along the road toward Mike's house. Will's brother was picking him up there later; Will never biked home alone anymore. His mom was too scared to lose him, Mike guessed. He didn't blame her. If Elle—if there was any chance he could ever see her again, he wouldn't want to let her out of his sight.

"You really miss her, don't you?"

He turned his head to see Will looking at him. There was nothing mocking in his friend's face, no teasing about Elle being a girl or anything, so Mike nodded. "I really do."

"Because—you liked her?" Will asked hesitantly.

Mike nodded again, admitting it to someone else for the first time.

"I wish I'd met her."

"I wish you had, too. She was—amazing. So smart, and ... pretty." He didn't think about her in the blonde wig, which had been weird, but like normal, with her hair cut off and her big eyes watching him. "She never told me what happened to her, or where she came from, but she ... didn't know anything. So everything I showed her—it was like seeing my whole life for the first time, you know?"

"Yeah." Will swallowed hard. "I know."

He did, too, Mike could see. It was in his eyes. He thought for the first time what it must be like for Will, to have gone back to his life as though nothing had changed, when for him, everything had changed. "It's weird now, isn't it?"

"Oh, yeah." Will nodded his head emphatically. "Super weird." He looked hesitantly over at Mike. "I'm glad you understand."

"Yeah. I'm glad you do, too."

They were in sight of Mike's house now, and like they had passed through an invisible wall, they both started talking about this weekend's D&D campaign. But they had recognized something in each other that they didn't see in anyone else, and their friendship had changed. Like them, it would never be the same.